# Michael Picucci

*Active Pause  November 2014*

Dr. Michael Picucci, PhD, MAC, SEP, brings decades of investigation and experience to his practice of Psychotherapy, Focalizing and Consulting. His professional expertise spans a wide-range of disciplines as a Psychologist, Licensed Psychotherapist, Master Addictions Counselor, Sexologist, Somatic Experiencing Practitioner and Organizational Consultant.
Recipient of the National Institutes of Health "Outstanding Leadership in Research Award," the last 30 years of Dr. Picucci's exploration in Social Sciences, Organizational Development and Energy Psychology has focused on addictions, trauma healing, sexuality, and interpersonal and group dynamics. During this time he has been observing and creating rituals for sane, healthy living for individual clients, couples, groups and organizations.
The story of this journey and his discoveries is told in Dr. Picucci's books as well as in all his other published works on healing and wholeness for individuals and communities, which can be found on his website.

Serge Prengel, LMHC is the editor the *Relational Implicit* project (http://relationalimplicit.com).

For better or worse, this transcript retains the spontaneous, spoken-language quality of the podcast conversation.

*Serge Prengel*: This is a conversation with Michael Picucci. Hi, Michael.

Michael Picucci: Hi Serge

*Serge*: So, Michael, how have you become who you are?

Michael: I guess the "who I am" person you meet today began to really come alive when I was about 29, 30 years old, when I really hit a brick wall —and for me at that time it was the need to recover from addiction, I had to deal with it. That began a whole amplified reflective process on how I got to where I am, which I don't know if I would have done otherwise. I had already started therapy. Of course, when I started I told the therapist that I had no family issues; I just had a work problem. <laughing> And she was kind enough to give me space to think that was true. This is where I started what I now call my "stage one addictions recovery" and later stage two that all human beings have. Stage two is when the traumas of our lives that are unresolved begin to hold us back and take away our life potential. To me, it's more of a cultural situation than a personal one, but of course we have our personal experience. Somewhere around 1990, I was already a psychotherapist at the time, and I had a body experience with a polarity massage therapist who I was seeing for voice lessons, which came out of a retreat I had just facilitated—all men recovering from childhood sexual abuse. By the retreat's end all the participants had this new energy and they were determined to bring it out into the world. They all made statements at the end as to how they wanted to bring this energy out in their lives and the world. So I said, "well, if they're all doing it then I can too. I said I want to do voice lessons, which I've always wanted to do, and everyone's told me I don't have a voice. But when I went to this voice teacher who also used polarity massage along with the voice I had an extraordinary experience in my body. In doing the massage she would check in with me and say,

what are you noticing, as she very gently touched me. What happened is, in a very short period of time, ten years of trauma I experienced in the 80's—AIDS emerged through my body. So many of my friends were dying of so young. I had my own near-death experiences, and the loss of my partner Gil who carried me through all of that. All of those years and experiences flowed went through me and were in some way miraculously healed. All this in one brief polarity massage and voice lesson! And I can remember walking out of her office in the West 80's and thinking to myself, "what happened?" I had already been interested in body wisdom a little bit, but this was real, something happening inside of me. I thought, if this embodied 'new person' experience is available to me—with my feet solid on the floor, everything looking different, sharper, this was very special.

*Serge*: So, maybe just to amplify, to give some room to that experience that you were literally touched and in that way, you experienced a sense of connecting with all that trauma and being healed from it and at the same time feeling grounded in everything and everything became sharper and clearer.

Michael: It was like, when I was lying on the massage table, I had no idea this trauma was even inside of me. I knew I wasn't having the best of times, but I had no idea and I never had that kind of experience where it just organically did itself, through me, and when it was done, it was done! When I walked out of her office I never had to revisit any of that again in any kind of traumatic or unpleasant way.

*Serge*: Yeah, so, the two parts in what you're saying I just maybe want to amplify to check is that sense of organic process, that something you're realizing is happening organically, and that sense of completion is the result.

Michael: And that's what it was, it is a sense of completion, a wonderful physiological and mental clearing of sorts. I always mirror it back to myself because I think it's so important that I remember it, and move on from that stronger place.

*Serge*: Yeah. So, my question was how you became who you are. And the journey started at 29 and in a way when things were really bad and you were stuck.

Michael: Yes! What came out of that experience, that sort of awakening that I had, was a double-decade study of all the different body psychotherapies that were in my realm or reach, and energy related therapies, and experimenting with them, under great tutelage, all on myself. And what worked on me, I would then bring into my practice and ask clients if they would like to experiment with the somatic work I was learning. Over time, what it's really done, is it's brought me into living a whole other dimension of this world, of life, which is inexplicable, really, because you're living between kind of unseen realities and seen realities, and negotiating back and forth with that. It is amazing! Thank god I have enough people around me who are doing the same thing that I don't feel like I'm crazy. <laughing>.

*Serge*: So, that sense of navigating between the unseen realities and the seen reality and the necessary, in a way, resource of having other people doing that for the grounding…

Michael: I think, in a very brief way, I have said what makes me who I am. I could go into details, but today past details are not so important to me. My presence right here, right now, with you and with whoever is listening to this, that's more important to me than details. Where I am now isn't a place

of inner-war and struggle. That may sound like it's always happy, lovely, but I don't mean that. I mean a more multidimensional way of being. There are so many things I can't believe that I'm experiencing as real, yet they are. When I allow myself to make it all silly and fun an energy I've come to call "source energy" moves through me.

*Serge*: With that sense of inner conflict in the background, maybe we can talk a little more about the experience of source energy?

Michael: To me the experience of source energy is being with nature's energy that we're made out of and the deeper intelligence it accesses. The logical mind (which is part of that source energy) really doesn't have a way to hold it because it sensed and nuanced. The logical mind is not equipped for this, it operates in a linear fashion holding all we have been exposed to, and is often conflicted about that. These somatic healing experiences can't really be put into the kind of language that the logical mind uses. So, source energy is just a presence of you and I being here together now and not having any agendas or preconceived notions of where we should go, how we should do this, and just being together, allowing all to flow authentically and organically. In that being together is the noticing of a presence in that energy (that we're made of) that takes form in different ways in our bodies and miraculously runs our systems. We now have technologies that allow us to access the deeper parts of our brain and physiology to allow them to realign with nature —to allow nature to emerge through us, rather than us thinking that we know what nature does.

*Serge*: Yeah. So maybe that's why you use the word technology. I want to use it as a gateway for exploring more. Then in a way we're not just talking about source energy as some kind of a mystical force that we don't know how to access, but what you call technology is clinical and non-clinical ways in which this can be accessed. You know, a new clinical tool.

Michael: That might be one of the user-friendliest ways of getting experience with that energy especially for a person with a highly developed logic system. Very logical people sometimes have difficulty with the sensory aspects. As in Peter Russell's tiny little book "From Science to God", I really think he does a beautiful job of showing us how we really are energy. Taking that a step further would be one of my mentors and colleagues Otto Scharmer from M.I.T. and his U Theory. Otto teaches presencing and how do we bring that out into the world. These are wonderful technologies that are yet to show their full potential in creating a better future.

*Serge*: Let's take this even one step further downstream of how this manifests in a session in your work with clients.

Michael: It is different in every session and with every client. The best I can say to you is how it manifests. I do my best to educate the client in intellectual and physiological ways as to what is available to them. As to how we could use a session type I have found to be particularly efficient. I invite clients to explore to the degree that they're comfortable. Some people are faster, more comfortable than others, some slower. I love your Active Pause technique Serge particularly for people who have a little more trouble coming out of the thinking mind, putting it aside so they can be more embodied. I have clients, mainly the younger ones like thirty and under, for some reason I'm blessed with a number of those, and they'll come in and they'll just start doing what my Skype client from Ireland calls "freefalling." They will just plunge into an energetic field with me and share their inner expansions and contractions and what they learned from that and how they're working that and asking me for feedback from my experience, They have different areas they're a little

confused about. And I just share with them whatever comes through me, through the source energy that is me, and I'm with them because we have created this field of source energy that we're both consciously choosing to hang out in.

*Serge*: So let me take a crack at restating it in my own words to see if I get it. So, a sense of transitioning from something that is more of a mental process, more of a talking about, to going into more of a process mode where people get in touch with their physical sensations with the process itself, and in a way creating a field between the two of you where the two of you are in process and you connect through that experience. What is interesting here is that clients report that even when we freefall after an embodiment exercise, that in the end all that they cognitively brought to my office as challenges get resolved in a nonlinear fashion. It's a very different experience than the typical discussion or analysis of difficulties. This is where we see the colossal difference between resolving situations with the cognitive mind vs. tapping into nature's innate intelligence.

Michael: For some people that would sound impossible and not very interesting to them. And for people like that just by making that okay, and agreeing, you can still hang out at the edge of it in case they ever want to explore deeper. To me this begins a resolution process in terms of that physiological barrier the client may be carrying.

*Serge*: So in other words, in a way for the healing to happen, it takes place in that field, in that source energy, and part of the work is going to be a quick leap into it or it's going to be sitting at the edge of it until there is a comfort to going there. And this is the space where healing can happen, where natural evolutional changes can happen.

Michael: Yes. For some reason, it makes me want to explain this Focalizing process. This technology is the word I like to use to separate this somatic and energetic experience from talk therapy (as we've come to know it) and also to separate it from spiritual or religious philosophies to think of it as a technology for connecting with source energy. But the reason I had to create a word for it is because it evolved out of my experience of working with a yogi for a number of years that taught me how to hear the innate intelligence of the body and to work with it. I already had that, and then discovering Peter Levine's Somatic Experiencing (SE) training. Peter gave me a whole new language and some nice new pieces that went beyond my earlier learning, especially in a clinical setting. My previous yogi teacher being influenced differently did not make it easy to transition to a clinical setting. For that I can thank Peter. He's given us a big gift! However, one of the things I've noticed after doing SE for several years is that it also had additional applications, like barrier resolution. I'll use the quick example when I say barrier resolution (or dissolution): a perfectly articulate executive client will come in and tell me that although he's articulate, when he has to go and talk to the boss about a promotion that he wants, he can't find his voice. And that's what a physiologic barrier feels like.

*Serge*: So I want to comment because I'm seeing you, that people who are going to just simply hear the recording, that as you're talking you have that body language of like, your body wanting to move forward and your hand at your throat. So it's experiencing the blockage, and so when you're talking about that barrier experience in your mind you're not just talking about a concept, but you're also experiencing and communicating the physicality of that experience.

Michael: Yes. I actually almost can't talk about it without experiencing it.

*Serge*: Yes.

Michael: I guess you're noticing that in my body language.

*Serge*: Which is in a way like the nature of your connection to it is not an abstract connection, is like almost a mirror neuron experience as you're talking about it you're feeling that experience and so your connection to that experience comes from experiencing it yourself.

Michael: Yes, yes, which to me is the experience of source energy, that compassion, that desire to be, to express in whatever way each of us has it uniquely.

*Serge*: So, in the field of source energy as you're talking about it you're not really talking about it you're not talking about it from outside, but you're talking about it from connecting to the experience of source energy.

Michael: Yes. And the other area (aside from trauma resolution) I noticed that SE technology was very helpful for people with sexual and relationship barriers. They may not have ever seen themselves as trauma survivors, they would never think of the word trauma, so they would never come to do trauma resolution work, but they come for these outer manifestations of trauma. And so what we do is we use the same techniques with a few little additions and we let intention direct the energy of the session. An example: Like the intention to be liberated from this barrier to be able to speak to my boss, or be a better lover, or less of a sense of inner imprisonment.

*Serge*: So maybe that's a good example to talk a little more about in the focalizing approach.

Michael: Because of that and because of the intimacy aspect that people came to work with I realized that if we just think of this as trauma resolution a whole lot of people can be helped with a many other issues and may also resolve traumas they didn't even know they had, but it needed another name because Somatic Experiencing is about trauma. I wrote an article for the Somatic Experiencing Newsletter about seven years ago, sharing my emergence of this. The word focalizing itself came from the Brits. I went to the first International Sex and Spirit Conference in Findhorn, Scotland and there were about one hundred and thirty people there. They called the people who led the workshops there for four days "focalizers". I'd never heard that term before. In my experience, those people had a gift. They had the ability—it's a gift I've been fortunate enough to have as well—to help other align collective energies to the highest level in bringing a group together.

*Serge*: So maybe let's stay with that; focalizing is related to that sense of being able to bring the collective energy together at the highest level for all present.

Michael: Yes. So I noticed that common attribute between them so I associated this new word focalizing with my experience. When I came back from Scotland I realized, well that's what I do in leading workshops, that's what I've been doing for years, and it gives me a word that I can use to distinguish this from being just a trauma healing technology. It immediately made these tools available to a larger population.

*Serge*: But so, in that sense, there's also when you talk about bringing the energy together at the highest level is also that sense of a larger container, there's that sense of energies, so there are a lot of concepts that are married together in that.

Michael: Yes.

*Serge*: So in practice, again understanding it's never the same with every client's differences, but what are things that in a way correct your eyes, your work, that somebody might notice in your clinical work that would set it apart?

Michael: I don't know about setting it apart. I don't even want to go there. What most interests me is making focalizing available to as many people as possible. I can do that?

*Serge*: Yes.

Michael: What most interests me is the magic, and not that it happens every time or with everyone. With some people it's so accessible that all of a sudden they and the universe are working together in some collaborative effort of helping them find contentment in their worlds.

*Serge*: Again, nice thing because it's the exact opposite of where the stuck-ness is. The stuck-ness is where a person feels very alone in a hostile universe and what you're describing is they and the universe work together to bring them to a state of contentment, so we're talking about literally the experience turned on its head, real transformation.

Michael: Yes. And now to take it a step further, it could be a person staying in a house all by him or herself, I mean that could be the right thing for them to feel part of the whole for a particular time. That's why we have to be very careful in thinking we know what other people *should* be doing.

*Serge*: So that connection is not necessarily a sense of being gregarious, but it's at a deeper personal level of self relating and connecting with the cosmos.

Michael: Yes, yes for some people to connect, they have to be in such a safe place, to feel an inner sense of life, and we have to honor that as well, life and aliveness in all its forms.

*Serge*: Let's take a moment to see whether it feels right to leave it at this or is there something else you might want to add, to give understandingly a very brief introduction as opposed to entering into the complexities of this.

Michael: What comes is a "me" statement: I'm just fascinated and feel so blessed. iI you looked at my life on paper and what I've experienced I don't look like a blessed person <laughing>. I would look like a very troubled person, but that I've lived in a time where there's been such enormous change in the healing arts and that I've been a part of it, through the sixties, the seventies, the eighties, nineties and still today. Some of it was horrible, and much of it was great. I loved the sixties. Now, being a participant in this whole new technology potential of finding our content places on the planet is a big 'Wow!' Wherever this all goes, just to be part of the alive process *that* to me is truly a gift.

*Serge*: Thanks, Michael.

Michael: You're very welcome.

🕮 *This conversation was transcribed by Rachel Vitale.*

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